

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PORT M 01248 070330Z
ACTION EA-12

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2585
INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: NA
TAGS: PDEV BP
SUBJ: SOLOMON ISLANDS INDEPENDENCE TALKS

REF: A) STATE 175576 (NOTAL), B) PORT MORESBY 1021 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: CONFERENCE ON SOLOMON ISLANDS CONSTITUTION
CONVENES IN LONDON SEPT 6, 1977. PROSPECT IS FOR COMPROMISE
ON LAST CONTENTIOUS ISSUE-CITIZENSHIP REQUIREMENTS- AND
FOR INDEPENDENCE DATE IN MID-1978. END SUMMARY.

2. GSI DELEGATION CONSISTING OF 30 MEMBERS HAS LEFT FOR CONFERENCE
ON SOLOMON ISLANDS INDEPENDENCE CONSTITUTION TO BEGIN
IN LONDON SEPT 6 AND EXPECTED TO LAST ONE WEEK. DELEGATION
INCLUDES 25 OF THE 38 MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY,
LED BY CHIEF MINISTER KENILOREA.

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3. GSI CONSTITUTIONAL DRAFT THAT WILL BE BASIS OF DISCUSSIONS
CALLS FOR CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY WITH INDEGENOUS GOVERNOR-
GENERAL WHICH WOULD AUTOMATICALLY CONVERT TO REPUBLIC AFTER ONE
YEAR WITH PRESIDENT ELECTED BY PARLIAMENT AS CHIEF-OF-STATE.
PARLIAMENT WOULD BE ELECTED BY UNIVERSAL ADULT SUFFRAGE AND COULD
PREVENT THE ALTERATION TO A REPUBLIC BY TWO-THIRDS VOTE. CONVERSION
TO REPUBLIC IS NOT GENERALLY POPULAR AND IS REPORTED TO BE

CONCESSION TO ULUFA'ALU OPPOSITION GROUP.

4. CONSTITUTIONAL DRAFT ALSO CONTAINS PROVISIONS FOR EXTENSIVE DECENTRALIZATION. CITIZENSHIP AND LAND OWNERSHIP PROVISIONS OCCASIONED DISAGREEMENT WITH UK AND POSTPONEMENT OF CONFERENCE FROM JUNE 1977 TO SEPTEMBER (REFTEL B). CITIZENSHIP PROVISIONS SPECIFY AUTOMATIC CITIZENSHIP FOR INDIGENOUS RESIDENTS AND STRICT NATURALIZATION REQUIREMENTS THAT WOULD ESSENTIALLY EXCLUDE GILBERTESE RESIDENTS. LAND OWNERSHIP PROVISIONS PROHIBITED FREEHOLD OWNERSHIP OF LAND BY NON-CITIZEN OR NATURALIZED CITIZENS.

5. JULY TAKS IN HONIARA WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF COMMONWEALTH OFFICE CONVINCED GSI THAT LAND PROVISIONS CAN BE IMPLEMENTED BY PARLIAMENT AND NEED NOT BE ENTRENCHED IN CONSTITUTION. LONDON CONFERENCE WILL THUS CENTER ON CITIZENSHIP ISSUE.

6. CHIEF MINISTER KENILOREA PUBLICLY STATED ON EVE OF DEPARTURE THAT HE EXPECTED INDEPENDENCE IN FIRST QUARTER OF 1978. BRITISH WOULD PREFER THAT FATE, BUT HAVE PRIVATELY PREDICTED LATER IN 1978.

7. COMMENT: GSI HAS PRESENTED LAND OWNERSHIP BILL THAT WOULD CONVERT ALL NON-INDIGENOUS -OWNED LAND TO 75-YEAR LEAST TERM LEASEHOLD WITH A 7-YEAR RENT MORATORIUM. IF PASSED AS EXPECTED, THIS BILL WOULD REMOVE MAIN CITIZENSHIP CONCERN OF GSI, THAT OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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NATURALIZED CITIZENS OWNING LAND, AND THAT PROVISION, WHICH THE BRITISH WOULD FIND OBJECTIONABLE, IN CONSTITUTION MIGHT COULD BE DELETED. COMPROMISE MAY WELL BE REACHED IN LONDON ON OTHER ASPECTS OF CITIZENSHIP PROVISIONS. INDEPENDENCE DATE COULD THEN BE SET IN FIRST HALF OF 1978, IF CONSTITUTION APPROVED BY UK PARLIAMENT AND SI ASSEMBLY.

8. NOTE: DRAFT CONSTITUTION HIGHLIGHTS SOLOMON ISLANDS MELANESIAN TIES BY MAKING SPECIAL CITIZENSHIP PROVISIONS FOR RESIDENTS WITH PAPUA NEW GUINEAN OR NEW HEBRIDIAN BACKGROUND, AS WELL AS FOR DESCENDANTS OF SOLOMON ISLANDERS WHO WERE "BLACKBIRDED" TO FIJI OR AUSTRALIA.
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Message Attributes

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